

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VALLET 02585 01 OF 03 101612Z
ACTION EUR-12

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TRSE-00 OMB-01 EB-08 /097 W
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R 101352Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8394
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USNATO
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VALLETTA 02585

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MT, LY
SUBJECT: THE MALTESE/LIBYAN MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

REF: VALLETTA 2534

1. I WANT TO ALERT THE DEPARTMENT TO THE POSSIBILITY
THAT WE WILL SEE AN ADDED LIBYAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN
MALTA BEGINNING SOMETIME LATE THIS MONTH AND TO RAISE THE
POLICY QUESTION WHETHER THIS SHOULD CONCERN US. MY OWN
CONCLUSION IS THAT WE SHOULD DISCUSS THE QUESTION WITH
OUR EUROPEAN ALLIES WITH A VIEW TO ENCOURAGING ACTION
THAT WOULD HELP ENSURE THAT THE MALTESE DO NOT BECOME
OVERLY DEPENDENT ON THE LIBYANS FOR MILITARY SUPPLY.

2. THE FACTS CONCERNING THE EXISTING LIBYAN MILITARY
PRESENCE ARE THESE. A SUPER FRELON LIBYAN HELICOPTER
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PAGE 02 VALLET 02585 01 OF 03 101612Z

HAS BEEN BASED IN MALTA SINCE SUMMER 1974, SAID TO BE
ASSISTING THE MALTESE IN ANTI-SMUGGLING SURVEILLANCE (A
VIOLATION, INCIDENTALLY, OF THE MFA BUT ONE WHICH THE
BRITISH CHOSE TO OVERLOOK). THE LIBYANS HAVE SUPPLIED
TWO OF MALTA'S EIGHT EXISTING NAVAL PATROL CRAFT. THAT
IS THE EXTENT OF THE LIBYAN MILITARY PRESENCE. IN ITSELF
THIS IS OBVIOUSLY NO THREAT TO ANYONE. THERE IS NO

LIBYAN MILITARY TRAINING MISSION. THE COMMANDER AND OFFICERS OF THE AFM HAVE ALWAYS MADE IT CLEAR TO US THAT THEY WANT NO PART OF A LARGER LIBYAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN MALTA NOR, IF THE CHOICE WAS THEIRS, WOULD THEY LOOK TO LIBYA FOR THE EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING FOR WHATEVER MILITARY FUNCTIONS THEY WILL BE ASKED TO PERFORM AFTER THE UK DEPARTURE.

3. OUR CONCERN IS WHAT MAY NOW BE BEGINNING IN TERMS OF AN EXPANDED DEPENDENCE ON THE LIBYANS AND RELATING SPECIFICALLY TO THE GAP IN MALTESE SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) CAPABILITY FOLLOWING THE SCHEDULED DEPARTURE AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER OF THE RAF CANBERRA SQUADRON WHEN RAF RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAR CEASES. WE UNDERSTAND FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL MIZZI, AS WELL AS FROM REPORTS FROM OTHER SOURCES, THAT IN ANTICIPATION OF THIS GAP AND ALLEGEDLY IN THE FACE OF DELAYS AND PUTOFFS BY THE EUROPEANS IN RESPONSE TO APPROACHES BY MINTOFF TO THEM, HE HAS TURNED TO THE LIBYANS FOR HELP. AS A RESULT, WE ARE TOLD THAT TWO ADDITIONAL LIBYAN PATROL CRAFT AND TWO FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT, THE LATTER MANNED AT LEAST IN THE FIRST INSTANCE BY LIBYANS, WILL ARRIVE IN MALTA LATER THIS MONTH.

4. IN TELLING US THIS (VALLETTA 2534) MIZZI MADE IT CLEAR HE WAS NOT PERSONALLY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THIS DEVELOPMENT, EXPRESSING HIS OWN VIEW THAT MALTA SHOULD NOT BECOME OVERLY CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 VALLET 02585 01 OF 03 101612Z

DEPENDENT ON ANY ONE COUNTRY IN ANY AREA. (THIS, INCIDENTALLY, IS A THEME WE ARE HEARING THESE DAYS FROM OTHERS IN GOVERNMENT WHO EXPRESS THEIR APPREHENSION ABOUT THE LIBYAN CONNECTION IN GENERAL, FURTHER STRENGTHENING US IN OUR OWN CONTINUING ASSESSMENT THAT MINTOFF STILL GENUINELY WANTS A BALANCE IN HIS NEUTRALITY CONCEPT FOR MALTA AND HAS NOT YET GIVEN UP ON THE EUROPEANS.) NONETHELESS, ADDS MIZZI, MINTOFF FINDS IT DIFFICULT NOT TO GO ALONG WITH THE LIBYANS ON THIS (SAR) AND OTHER AREAS OF NEED, GIVEN THEIR READINESS TO ASSIST AND GIVEN ALLEGED EUROPEAN FOOT DRAGGING - ON WHICH MIZZI CAN WAX ELOQUENT.

5. THERE IS UNDOUBTEDLY MUCH THAT IS TACTICAL IN ALL THIS. IT IS A FURTHER REMINDER TO THE EUROPEANS IN MINTOFF'S CONTINUING GAME WITH THEM (AND US) THAT HE HAS AN ARAB OPTION TO PICK UP. MOREOVER A FEW MORE LIBYAN PATROL BOATS AND AIRCRAFT IN MALTA ARE NOT GOING TO MAKE THE GOM IRREVOCABLY DEPENDENT ON LIBYA FOR MILITARY SUPPLY AND WILL OBVIOUSLY NOT UPSET THE POWER BALANCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. FOR THAT MATTER THERE IS A GENUINE SAR NEED IN MALTA FOLLOWING THE BRITISH DEPARTURE AND IF THE LIBYANS ARE PREPARED TO HELP FILL IT, PERHAPS THAT IS WELL AND

GOOD.

6. THE POLICY QUESTION WE RAISE, HOWEVER, IS WHERE THIS GOES FROM HERE AND WHETHER, AND IF SO WHEN, IT SHOULD CONCERN US. DO WE, PARTICULARLY IN THE AREA OF MILITARY SUPPLY, SMALL THOUGH THAT MAY BE IN MALTA, SIMPLY CONTINUE TO RELY ON OUR PRESENT PERCEPTION OF MINTOFF'S OWN ULTIMATE POLITICAL REALISM? IS IT IN OUR INTERESTS TO LET A TREND DEVELOP THAT COULD ULTIMATELY BECOME A DEGREE OF REAL DEPENDENCE ON LIBYA FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT? WHAT IMPLICATIONS, IF ANY, WOULD THIS HAVE ON OUR INTERESTS MORE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 VALLET 02585 02 OF 03 101616Z
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SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 L-03 DODE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 VALLETTA 02585

BROADLY IN THIS PART OF THE MEDITERRANEAN? ARE THERE BENEFITS THAT MIGHT CONCEIVABLY, OVER TIME, ACCRUE TO THE SOVIETS, GIVEN LIBYAN RELIANCE ON THEM FOR MILITARY SUPPLY?

7. WE HESITATE TO COME UP WITH ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS, BASED ON WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR. BUT WE BELIEVE THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS AREA ARE IN ANY EVENT SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH TO DISCUSS WITH CERTAIN OF OUR EUROPEAN ALLIES, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR POLICY OBJECTIVE OF ENSURING A STRONG EUROPEAN CONNECTION FOR MALTA. IN THE EMBASSY'S POLICY ASSESSMENT EARLIER THIS YEAR, WE RECOMMENDED THAT WE SUGGEST TO THE

EUROPEANS THAT THEY CONSIDER OFFERING, IN THE CONTEXT OF AN AGREED PACKAGE OF OVERALL ASSISTANCE TO MALTA, MILITARY SUPPLY ARRANGEMENTS IN SUPPORT OF A SMALL MALTESE MILITARY FORCE WITH EMPHASIS ON AIR/SEA SURVEILLANCE AND RESCUE UNITS. WE REITERATE THAT RECOMMENDATION, HAVING REGARD IN CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 VALLET 02585 02 OF 03 101616Z

THIS RESPECT FOR THE DIRECTIVE IN THE GOALS IMPLEMENTATION PAPER FOR MALTA (JUST RECEIVED AT THIS POST) THAT WE SHOULD SEEK TO "DISCOURAGE ANY EFFORTS THAT MIGHT ARISE TO FORM POLITICAL OR MILITARY ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE USSR AND LIBYA."

8. WE ARE NOT SAYING THAT ANY DANGEROUS "ARRANGEMENTS" ARE IMMINENT. THERE WILL BE SOME "ARRANGEMENTS" WITH LIBYA IN ANY EVENT IF MINTOFF PERSISTS WITH HIS "BALANCED" CONCEPT. BUT WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE EUROPEANS TO ACT IN TIME TO ASSURE THAT THESE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MANAGEABLE IN TERMS OF WESTERN INTERESTS. ALTHOUGH MINTOFF APPEARS TO ATTACH ONLY LOW PRIORITY TO MILITARY ISSUES, CERTAINLY SO IN CONTRAST TO HIS ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE DEMANDS, AN INDICATION OF EUROPEAN WILLINGNESS TO HELP EQUIP AND TRAIN A SMALL SECURITY FORCE MIGHT FACILITATE THE DIALOGUE OVERALL WHEN IT RESUMES WITH THE EUROPEANS.

9. AS IT IS, MINTOFF CAN WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION POINT TO HIS HAVING BEEN IGNORED ON THIS FRONT. THAT INCLUDES A REQUEST FOR CERTAIN MILITARY ASSISTANCE MADE TO BOB ELLSWORTH IN DECEMBER 1976, A REQUEST WE CHOSE TO IGNORE AND WHICH IN ANY EVENT HAS NEVER BEEN REITERATED TO ME. IN JULY 1977 MINTOFF ASKED THE THEN ITALIAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE DURING A VISIT TO MALTA TO GIVE HIM AN ANALYSIS OF MINTOFF'S FUTURE DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS. SO FAR AS WE KNOW NOTHING CAME OF THIS, IN PART BECAUSE THAT MOD SHORTLY THEREAFTER WAS RELIEVED OF HIS PORTFOLIO. IN GENSCHER'S NOVEMBER 1977 VISIT TO MALTA, MINTOFF GAVE HIM A LIST OF DEFENSE EQUIPMENT NEEDS PREPARED BY AFM COMMANDER GERA AND ASKED TO WHAT EXTENT THE FRG WOULD BE PREPARED TO HELP. THE FRG HAS NOT YET RESPONDED AND ITS EMBASSY HERE IS UNCLEAR AS TO WHEN OR EVEN IF IT WILL.

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PAGE 03 VALLET 02585 02 OF 03 101616Z

10. A SUBSEQUENT REQUEST BY MINTOFF OF SENIOR UK MILITARY OFFICIALS IN MALTA TO GIVE HIM SOME IDEA WHAT THEY FELT MALTA WOULD NEED FOR DEFENSE PURPOSES PRODUCED A BRITISH

SERVICES TEAM VISIT TO MALTA IN JUNE 1978. THAT TEAM HAS NOW GIVEN THE GOM A PRELIMINARY REPORT (POUCHED EUR/WE). THE REPORT IS VERY PRELIMINARY IN NATURE AND SIMPLY REACTS IN A GENERAL WAY TO THE SECURITY JUSTIFICATION PERCEIVED BY THE TEAM FOR ITEMS OF MILITARY AND POLICE EQUIPMENT ACROSS THE BOARD INCLUDED ON A LIST PREPARED BY THE GOM. WE GATHER FROM THE UK HIGH COMMISSION THAT HMG REGARDS THE BALL ENTIRELY IN THE MALTESE COURT FOR THE PRESENT; IT DOUBTS THAT HMG INTENDS ANY FURTHER INITIATIVE ON THIS EXERCISE.

11. NONETHELESS WE BELIEVE THIS BRITISH PAPER COULD SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR THE EUROPEANS BEGINNING A MORE DEFINITIVE LOOK AT THE PROBLEM. (ALSO AVAILABLE IS AFM COMMANDER GERA'S "DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS PLAN" OBTAINED BY DATT MALTA (IR 6-917-77) BUT FOR SOME REASON NOT GIVEN TO THE BRITISH TEAM AS A BASIS FOR THEIR STUDY.) WE ASSUME THE GERMANS WOULD NOT BE PREPARED FOR POLICY REASONS TO BECOME ENGAGED IN DIRECT MILITARY SUPPLY TO THE MALTESE, ALTHOUGH THEY MIGHT BE PREPARED TO CONSIDER THE SALE OR GRANT OF EQUIPMENT OSTENSIBLY FOR SAR OR POLICE PURPOSES. WE KNOW OF NO CURRENT ITALIAN FOCUS ON THE MATTER, ALTHOUGH THEIR MILITARY MISSION HERE REPRESENTS A DEGREE OF RESIDENT EXPERTISE. THE PROBLEM, AS ALWAYS WITH THE EUROPEANS WHEN THEY (AND WE) LOOK AT MALTA IS THAT THERE IS NO FOCUS. BY CONTRAST, SAY THE MALTESE WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION, THE LIBYANS RESPOND IMMEDIATELY.

12. WE RECOMMEND WE DISCUSS THE MATTER INFORMALLY IN THE FIRST INSTANCE WITH THE BRITISH, AND POSSIBLY THE GERMANS

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 VALLET 02585 03 OF 03 101616Z
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SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 L-03 DODE-00
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 VALLETTA 02585

AS WELL - EITHER HERE IN VALLETTA OR, PREFERABLY, IN
CAPITALS. WHAT IS INVOLVED IS ALMOST MINUTE IN TERMS OF
MATERIAL; IT IS MANAGEABLE FOR EUROPE; IT CAN BE A MIX OF
GRANT, PURCHASE, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING.
WE NEED HAVE NO APPARENT INVOLVEMENT, UNLESS THE QUESTION
OF THIRD COUNTRY TRANSFERS OF CERTAIN EQUIPMENT SHOULD
ARISE. BUT IF WE CAN STIMULATE SOME KIND OF AGREED
EUROPEAN POSITION ON THE PROBLEM, PUT INTO PLAY IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE OVERALL EUROPEAN DIALOGUE AND IN TIME TO
KEEP MANAGEABLE WHATEVER LIBYAN OPTION MAY BE TROTTED OUT,
OUR OWN INTERESTS WILL BE SERVED. LAINGEN

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